DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 986 CS 214 872

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TITLE Research Analysis of Primary Children's Writings.
PUB DATE 8 Jun 95
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Language; *Childrens Writing; *Developmental Stages; *Invented Spelling; Language Experience Approach; Literature Reviews; Primary Education; Reading Writing Relationship; Spelling Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Emergent Literacy; *Writing Development

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show that children go through writing stages while learning to write. Understanding these stages can help children become more effective writers in expressing feelings, memories, and concerns to gain recognition with themselves and others. A literature review examined stages of writing and long-term results from using invented spelling. It is clearly shown (Marietta Hurst et al., 1983) that most children do go through stages in their writing. Not all children go through stages at the same time and some children may even skip a stage, but children's writings nevertheless show what stage of writing they are in for that piece of writing. Also, the stages of writing are not always labeled the same from researcher to researcher but a correspondence between the stages they identify is nevertheless evident. Research also shows that invented spelling is important for children because it allows them to take risks and write without the fear of making mistakes. J. Barnhart and E. Sulzby (1986) show that children, no matter what their socioeconomic status, begin to make transitions over to conventional spelling "with little threat." Hipple's research (1985) shows that even when children regress, they still develop when it is appropriate for them to do so. D. Richgels (1995) found that good invented spellers were also good readers. Children, who write intending to convey a message, can read and reread their own invented spelling writings almost the same every time. (Contains 12 references.) (TB)

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Research Analysis of Primary Children's Writings

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

If u cn rd ths y shd I lrn 2 spl? (If you can read this, why should I learn to spell?) (Haefell, 1995).

This is a fair question coming from a young emergent writer. In order to answer this question, one must understand what writing is all about from a child's perspective first and not from the adult's view. A child's success or failure as a writer can depend on the support and allowances given to learn as a child.

Just as children learn to crawl before walking and babble before talking, a child must learn to scribble and use invented spelling before writing at the conventional level conveying a message that everyone can read. If you take this developmental stage of writing away from children, they develop a fear of writing and may eventually not want to write at all. Then, children unnecessarily become perfectionist. More and more teachers realize that children need the process more than the product. It is the writing process of thoughts that are more important than the conventional spelling in writing (Gentry, 1982).

Significance of the study:

The purpose of this study is to show that children go through writing stages while learning to write. Understanding these stages can help children become more effective writers in expressing feelings, memories and concerns to gain recognition with themselves and others (Calkins, 1986).

Statement of the problem:

Do children go through stages or levels from invented to conventional spelling in their writings?

Definitions of terms:

conventional spelling: dictionary spelling of words (Routman, 1991).

invented spelling: Children use beginning consonants to represent words or sentences (Routman, 1991).

primary grade levels: includes kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade (Fiderer, 1986).

transitional spelling: Children are beginning to understand spelling patterns. Words are spelled partially correct (Routman, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Research

Introduction

The related research for this study is broken down into two areas: stages of writing and long-term results using inventive spelling.

Stages of Writing

Mary Domico (1992) conducted a research study to identify behavior patterns while young writers were learning to write. The study included a total of 18 subjects from kindergarten, first grade and second grade students from three elementary classrooms. These subjects were grouped according to pre-school, day care and kindergarten experiences. All subjects came from literate environments and from urban public schools. The research study using these subjects was descriptive and exploratory.

First, all subjects of the three classrooms were interviewed to gain general attitudes about writing, understanding of writing, and the understanding of conventional coding and revision prior to their selection as subjects. Teachers of the three classrooms were then asked to rank their students on a

low, average, and high continuum on what they thing the students understanding of writing and the printed code. From this ranking process, the students were divided into three sub-groups (low, average, high groups) in each class. Then, two students, one boy and one girl, from each of the groups were seclected. (Domico, 1992)

During a 25 week period, the subjects' writings were collected and weekly interviews were conducted. During the interviews, the subjects reread their writings, were recorded and transcriptions were taken of the writer's discussions of their products. (Domico, 1992)

Twenty-five samples were collected from each student. From those samples, they were examined for patterns of growth and regression. Rating scales were used to record patterns and regressions to be easily identified. Most subjects regressed in different areas of their work as they focused on a particular aspect of their writing. The analysis, even through the regression, showed that all the subjects went through progressive patterns of growth.

Carol Funderburk's (1986) meta-analysis research review was focused on the theoretical and empirical studies of the ways children write. This study focused

on the ways that children write by posing these questions:

1. How has the work of Piaget been linked to the processes of children's writing?
2. Over the last fifteen years, what studies seem to have had a major impact on our understanding of the process of children's writing?
3. What are the current issues in children's writing?
4. What are the implications for further research?

Piaget's stages of development are examined and its implications on the way children learn to write. The stages include the preoperation, concrete, and formal operations. As a result, there were no specific relationships between these stages and the writing process. (Funderburk, 1986)

Studies including Temple, Nathan and Burris who authored The Beginnings of Writing in 1982, were examined among other studies and their study concluded that children make the same discoveries in the same order with writing. Temple, Nathan and Burris' findings opened discussions about invented spelling and the stages of the writing process. (Funderburk, 1986)

Current issues on drawing as pre-writing, language development and invented spelling and writing before reading were examined. Gardner (1980), as cited in Funderburk (1986) as well as many other researchers

since then, concluded that drawing precedes pre-writing and is essential to the pre-writing stage. Frances Kane (1980), as cited in Funderburk (1986), concluded that language development helped children develop an understanding of phonics that plays a major role in the beginning writing processes. Both Carol Chomsky (1971) and Kane (1982), as cited in Funderburk (1986), found that children learn to write before they learn to read. They also set the stage in strongly suggesting that reading should follow writing and that children should be allowed to read their own words written in their own way. (Funderburk, 1986)

Marietta Hurst, Lee Dobson, Mayling Chow, Joy Nucich, Lynda Stickley and Gwen Smith (1983), all investigated the process of early writers as they progressed through several stages. As a group, they based their study on the following objectives:

1. To confirm that emergent writing is a developmental language learning process with meaning as its central focus;
2. To discover the social and psychological environment which encourages children to actually engage in the hypothesis-testing process prerequisite to all learning;
3. To confirm that children's written communications reflect their existing understanding of written language and gradually evolve through successive approximations toward the conventional form;

4. To confirm that children's written communications reflect their existing understanding of written language and gradually evolve through successive approximations toward the conventional form;
5. To describe and field test an alternate route for early literacy instruction.

Samples of kindergarten, first and second grade writing was collected for this study. These examples were analyzed from an adults's logical view and from observations of what the subjects were actually doing. (Hurst et al., 1983)

The subjects were provided with colored pens, pencils, crayons and notebooks. The subjects then were asked to write up to 40 minutes a day with no direct help from the teacher. The subjects were to draw interesting pictures and then write about them. During that time, the subjects were observed for strategies and processes in their writing. (Hurst et al., 1983)

From the samples collected, the following stages of writing development were described: the pre-communicative stage, the semi-phonetic stage of development, the phonetic stage of development, and transitional stage. (Hurst et al., 1983)

Precommunicative Stage. The samples showed that the subjects were making their first attempts at writing. This would include scribble writing, circles,

lines, and actual letters. Adults cannot read the writing at this stage. Subjects do not show directionality and lack the understanding that letters are symbols of sound. Subjects will often prefer to write capital letters and may mix number symbols with the letters. (Hurst et al., 1983)

The Semi-Phonetic Stage of Development. The subjects are using letters to represent words. For example, a subject used the letter "c" to represent the word "see." The subjects were also showing signs that they understand that writing conveys messages. Upper-case letters at this stage were becoming fewer and lower-case letters were being used more often. Spaces begin to appear between words or word representations. (Hurst et al., 1983)

The Phonetic Stage of Development. Subjects began to use more letters to represent the sounds. Vowels were showing up even if they were not part of the conventional spelling. Reversed letters were used and capitalizations were decreased to names and nouns. The syntax of the sentences showed that the subjects were writing as they would speak. They also showed that they understood that words are separated. (Hurst et al., 1983)

The Transitional Stage. The subjects moved toward conventional spelling and started to use grammar and meaning in their writing. The subjects were still using phonetic strategies for unfamiliar words. Rhyming and word patterns started to show up their writings. Often subjects transposed letters within words. Punctuation started becoming part of the writing and thoughts were more complete. (Hurst et al., 1983)

Long-term Results Using Invented Spelling

June Barnhart and Elizabeth Sulzby (1986) examined early literacy in relation to task demands, general cognitive development, and socieconomic background using the following questions:

1. What differences are there in levels of writing and rereading development across writing tasks between children from two income levels?
2. What forms of writing do children use when asked to write isolated words, words as constituents of sentences, or a self-composed story?
3. What does the young child consider necessary in order for his written production to remain stable?
4. What is the relationship between children's writing development, general cognitive development, and school readiness?

The subjects used for this study included two kindergarten classrooms from a school district in a

northwestern suburb of Chicago. There were 32 kindergartners selected from the same district-governed curriculum. One classroom of 16 subjects was selected from the lower end of the yearly income level of $10,000 - $25,000 and the other classroom of 16 subjects were selected from the high income group of $50,000 or more a year. The mean age for both groups was 5 years, 5 months. (Barnhart & Sulzby, 1986)

There were four tasks in which each subject went through.

Task 1: The subjects were interviewed and then completed an additional two parts: writing of isolate words and writing words as constituents of sentences.

Task 2: The subjects were asked to write a story about how they learned to ride a big wheel/bicycle and to reread the story after it was written. This procedure was based on Sulzby's (1983) method and analysis scheme.

Task 3: The subjects were presented with three Piagetian task of conservation of number, seriation, and classification.

Task 4: The subjects were given the Metropolitan Readiness Test.

The results indicated that subjects in the high income group held a concept of writing that coincided with the adult conceptualization of writing. The low income subjects wrote strings of letters without understanding the reasons behind the writing or the order of the letters. The high income group also did better in rereading their stories than the low income group. When the subjects were asked to write isolated words, neither used conventional spelling. However, more subjects in the high income group used invented spelling than did the low income group. When the subjects wrote their stories, more subjects in high income group wrote with a mix of conventional and invented spelling than did the subjects of the low income group. (Barnhart & Sulzby, 1986)

Adele Fiderer's (1986) study showed the different levels of the average child in grades kindergarten, first, second, and third. The main purpose was to show teachers and parents what each of the primary grades did when they wrote.

The method used for this study was content analysis of the samples collected. The writing samples presented in this study included: kindergarten, 6 samples; first grade, 8 samples; second grade, 7

samples; and third grade, 4 samples. (Fiderer, 1986)

Each of the samples were examined for grade level performance expectations which included the students' writing processes (rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing and sharing), attitudes toward writing, appearance (drawings, letter size, horizontal text, writing utensil used, and number of words), and developmental problems (invented spellings, upper/lower case letters, pauses at the end of sentences when reading, events written and repetition of words). (Fiderer, 1986)

The content analysis showed that kindergartners used more drawings for writing. In the first and second grade samples, subjects were found to be very enthusiastic about writing and writing increased while drawings decreased. In third grade samples, the subjects' works began to regress and go through transitions as they became interested in appearance, order, and general correctness. (Fiderer, 1986)

Majorie Hipple (1985) addressed the following questions:

1. What would the content of the journals be?
2. What functions would the journals serve?
3. What writing stages would be exhibited in printed texts?

4. What trends would appear in the journal writing?
5. What would my role as teacher come to be?
6. Would journal writing be a worthwhile activity?

Hipple used a convenient sample of kindergartners to write in their journals about anything they wished to write about for 30 minutes a day. Dictation was taken from some of the children each day to help them make connections between their pictures, how they expressed ideas, and their writing. Each day two children were allowed to share what was written in their journals. They new beforehand what day they would be sharing so they could be prepared. (Hipple, 1985)

Observations were ongoing throughout the research to help answer the questions of this study. Samples of the the kindergartners' journals were collected throughout the school year. Three major categories were found in their writings: (1) Realism, (2) Fantasy, and (3) Isolated Concepts. (Hipple, 1985)

Over the course of the year, subjects progressed from single words to isolated concepts to varying sentences and categories away from realism. A few subjects went from invented spellings to the transitional stage. However, some of the creative

storytellers and emergent readers unexpectedly made no attempt to write texts of any kind. Also, one subject, who was using invented spelling stopped and begun to just draw pictures. It wasn't until the end of the year when the subject returned to invented spelling for a short time and then moved right into the transitional spelling stage. While other subjects who had never printed text, started writing with inventive spelling. This subject and others, who printed very little text tended to write fantasy. (Hipple, 1985)

One of the purposes of Donald Richgels' (1995) study was to determine whether kindergartners who have received no formal instruction in phonemic awareness or in spelling and identified as good inventive spellers would learn words better than kindergartners who were poor inventive spellers. The second purpose of this study was to determine if word difficulty interacts with spelling ability.

The subjects in this study were three kindergarten classes included 119 kindergartners chosen at random from two schools in a northwest suburb of Chicago. Of the 119, 66 were boys and 53 were girls. Their ages ranged from 5 years. 6 months to 7 years, 3 months with a median age at 6 years, 2 months. (Richgels, 1995)

This study was based on several correlational research studies but this study was causal-comparative to find out how spelling and reading tie in together. (Richgels, 1995)

The procedure was done in three tasks:

Task 1: The subjects were tested on the alphabet identification.

Task 2: The subjects were tested on word identification. The words were taken from the Woodcock-Johnson's (1978) first grade word list.

Task 3: Ten pictures were presented one by one to the subjects. The subjects used plastic magnetic letters of the alphabet to spell out the picture identified.

The results showed that good inventive spellers are better word learners and that good inventive spellers outperformed the poor inventive spellers in all words used in the printed word learning task in this study. This study also found that there is a correlation between inventive spelling and reading achievement. Inventive spellers were better able to use phoneme-grapheme correspondences on their own from what they already knew from the invented spelling strategies. (Richgels, 1995)

Summary

Hurst and others (1983) clearly showed that most children do go through stages in their writing. Not all children go through the stages at the same time and some children may even skip a stage, but the children's writings showed what stage they were in for that piece of writing. Funderburk (1986) recognizes that children go through stages and used those stages to connect language development. The stages weren't always labeled the same with every researcher but the different stages were clearly identified. Domico (1992) showed patterns of growth in children's writings that can also be linked to the different stages of writing. All three researchers, Hurst (1983), Funderburk (1986), and Domico (1992), did their research from three different positions; all proved or showed that there are stages in children's writing.

The use of invented spelling is important for children to take risks and write without the fear of making mistakes in conventional writing. Barnhart and Sulzby (1986) showed that children, no matter the socioeconomic status, began to make transitions over to conventional spelling with little threat. Fiderer (1986) examined the levels of children's writings and

came up with the results that invented spelling was important for children to write at their appropriate learning level for easier transition in school and to become better writers. Hipple (1985) took the research further to show that even when children regressed in a particular stage, they still progressed in writing when it was developmentally appropriate for them. Richgels (1995) found that good invented spellers were also good readers. Children, who write intending to convey a message, can read and reread their own invented spelling writings almost the same every time. Therefore, making connections to reading earlier and strengthening reading and writing skills and strategies.

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